

Early Childhood Subcommittee Report

Report to the Children's Services Commission

Submitted December, 2003

Preface

In May 2003, the Children's Services Commission appointed an Early Childhood Subcommittee. The charge for the committee was to examine the status of Missouri's youngest citizens and develop policy recommendations for ensuring that each child has access to the opportunities he or she needs to arrive at school ready to succeed. The Commission asked an impressive group of individuals to systemically evaluate the state structure. This included assessing existing services and programs; coordination among services; and duplication and gaps in services that help families raise happy, healthy children who have the skills they need to be ready for school.

Through a series of meetings and conference calls over six months, four workgroups and the Subcommittee as a whole identified the next steps that Missouri should take to ensure success for every child. This report highlights the status of Missouri's young children and what we know from the research about the critical importance of their development. It concludes with the policy recommendations from the Subcommittee to develop a more systemic approach to helping children succeed.

The work on state indicators of school readiness will ensure accountability toward achievement of this goal. The indicators, developed by a diverse group of early childhood stakeholders, will also help fine-tune the policy recommendations over the coming years.

We are grateful for the Commission's forward thinking in a tight fiscal climate. Our deep appreciation goes out to the dedicated members of the Subcommittee for the countless hours researching, discussing, and determining what must be done to ensure our children's success and our economic future. The final report was accepted by vote of the Subcommittee with one dissenting opinion. We extend special thanks to Linda

McCart, consultant with the State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network* for her support of this important work on behalf of Missouri's youngest citizens.

Sincerely,

Kathy R. Thornburg
Director, Center for Family Policy & Research
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Deborah E. Scott
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* The Network is supported by grants from the Kauffman Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, and the Ford Foundation.

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The State of Missouri's Young Children

- In Missouri, there are 369,911 children ages 0 to 5.ⁱ
- More than 18 percent of Missouri's young children were living in poverty in 2002. The poverty rate in St. Louis City is more than double this amount—36.4 percent—with more than 80 percent of the city's children eligible for free and reduced lunches.ⁱⁱ
- About 25 percent of Missouri's children enter school with scores significantly below average on readiness assessments; another 25 percent are deemed only moderately ready.ⁱⁱⁱ
- More than 64 percent of Missouri's young children have both parents in the workforce.^{iv}
- In Missouri, children's chances of attending a high quality, accredited child care program are less than 1 in 100 (only 403 child care facilities out of Missouri's 4,250 licensed centers and homes meet accreditation standards.)^v
- In Missouri, one in five births is to a mother with less than a high school education. Among minorities, more than 27 percent of all births are to a mother with minimal education.^{vi}
- In 2001, only 79 percent of Missouri's two-year-olds were fully immunized.^{vii}
- About 10 percent of all births in 2001 had inadequate pre-natal care.^{viii}
- In 2001, about 15 percent of children from birth to age six were screened for lead.^{ix}

The Research

The research is clear. With very few exceptions, babies are born with all of the brain cells that they will need to be successful over the course of their life. The research further tells us that the first few years of a child's life can determine whether the appropriate neural pathways are developed that will be the foundation for lifelong growth and learning or whether these connections will fail

to develop leading to trouble in school, failure in relationships, and failure to reach their full potential.^x

The research is also clear that two critical factors impact the development of the brain and children's subsequent success or failure—early experiences and early relationships. Both matter.^{xi}

Children raised in safe, stimulating environments are more confident, more independent, more creative, and more willing to take growth-producing risks than children without the opportunities to build the neural connections that support these traits. In contrast, extensive research on children who were raised in less stimulating environments documents that their brains can be 20-30 percent smaller than that of an average child.^{xii}

Similarly, relationships matter. The National Research Council describes relationships as the active ingredients of healthy social and emotional development. Relationships help children understand the world and people around them. They determine whether children will form secure attachments to their caregivers, thus feeling secure in exploring their world, or insecure attachments leading to constant fears, lack of trust, and the lack of confidence they need to succeed.^{xiii}

The research also tells us what works. Dr. Ross Thompson, the Carl A. Happold Distinguished Professor of Psychology, University of Nebraska, offers the following advice.

Society's commitment to ensuring the healthy development of every child requires far more than standing on the sidelines and wishing parents the best in their efforts to benefit their offspring. It requires enabling parents to integrate work and child responsibilities constructively through family-friendly job conditions, welfare reform that does not endanger stable parent-child relationships, affordable and desirable child care arrangements, and wage policies that ensure adequate family incomes. It requires helping parents to obtain the prenatal and postnatal health care that screen children for developmental difficulties before they become severe, guarantees adequate nutrition, and can protect young children from debilitating diseases and hazardous exposures.

The relationships that matter do not end with the immediate family. They also include the relationships that young children develop and depend upon in child care. Society's commitment to ensuring the healthy development of every child requires far more, therefore, than hoping that market forces make available high-quality, affordable care for young children. It requires equipping care providers with the knowledge and resources required to provide young children the kind of focused, sensitive care that offers essential catalysts to healthy psychological growth. It

requires esteeming the relationships between children and caregivers sufficiently that there are incentives—in wages and benefits, the structure of child care work, and public support—for these relationships to provide stable, reliable support for young children. Society's commitment to ensuring the healthy development of each child requires that all the relationships that young children rely upon are valued and supported.^{xiv}

Likewise, schools must be ready for all children. Every school must ensure that teaching strategies are adapted to each child's specific learning needs. Ready schools also smooth transitions between home and school or child care and school, are committed to the success of every child, and adapt practices and programs to ensure that all children benefit.^{xv}

The federal No Child Left Behind legislation mandates that schools guarantee that all third grade students are reading at grade level. The legislation also includes accountability measures that require schools to close achievement gaps between poor and non-poor and between minority and Caucasian children. Research confirms that quality early childhood experiences can have a significant impact on narrowing the gap before children come to school. Research also indicates that developing partnerships with parents and community service providers helps schools address these issues.^{xvi}

Finally, there is growing evidence that investments in early childhood interventions are sound social policy and good economics. Various studies indicate a range of long-term savings that far exceed government's original investment. These savings accumulate by diverting children and adolescents from welfare and crime, by reducing their need for special education and extensive health services, and by increasing earnings thus generating higher tax revenues. This body of research also confirms that quality interventions carefully targeted to children who need the most help are the most likely to produce savings that will exceed initial costs.^{xvii}

Dr. James J. Heckman, the 2000 Nobel Laureate in Economic Sciences and currently serving as the Henry Schultz Distinguished Service Professor of Economics at the University of Chicago, makes a compelling case for increasing investments in the early years.

Learning starts in infancy, long before formal education begins, and continues throughout life. Recent research in psychology and cognition demonstrates how vitally important the early preschool years are for skill formation. Significantly, this is a time when human ability and motivation are shaped by families and non-institutional environments. Early learning begets later learning and early success breeds later success, just as early failure breeds later failure. Success or failure at this stage lays the foundation for success or failure in school, which in turn leads to success or failure in post-school learning.^{xviii}

According to Dr. Heckman, “the real question is how to use the available funds wisely. The best evidence supports the policy prescription: **Invest in the very young.**”^{xix}

The Process

Like many states, Missouri has spent a number of years planning and working to develop a statewide system that provides the services and supports that families with young children need in order to help their children grow and succeed. We have made some progress and the work of the Subcommittee builds on the efforts of many agencies, organizations, and individuals over the last several years to enhance young children’s well-being. These efforts have been supported by several grants from the foundation community, the public sector, and state investments. The generous support from the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation and the Danforth Foundation have underwritten planning, data collection, and communications and supported professional development initiatives through the University of Missouri–Columbia. The Kansas City Community recently secured U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services grants, and the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services has secured a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services planning grant. Among the accomplishments are the following.

- Developed indicators in five critical domains to measure state progress toward achieving school readiness for every child
- Implemented the Workforce Incentive Project (WIN), an incentive system to recruit and retain high quality child care staff
- Developed a collaborative partnership and implemented the Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (TEACH) project to enhance early childhood teacher education, compensation, and subsequent retention
- Launched the Start-Up and Expansion Grant Fund to support new and existing child care centers
- Launched the Missouri Preschool Project to support school districts and others in establishing high quality preschools
- Established the Accreditation Fund to provide technical assistance to centers and homes seeking accreditation
- Implemented full-day Kindergarten in 508 of 524 school districts, covering 78 percent of the states’ 64,000 Kindergarten students
- Implemented the School Entry Assessment Project, an interagency initiative to examine readiness factors and lay the foundation for further work on school readiness

- Adopted and implemented the Core Competencies for Early Educators in Missouri and Kansas establishing standards for early care professionals in eight critical areas
- Established OPEN (Opportunities in a Professional Education Network), a career development initiative for early childhood education professionals
- Adopted early learning standards for pre-school children for use in child care centers and Head Start and by parents
- Established and implemented a statewide health consultation network to improve health and safety conditions in child care centers

Yet, much remains to be done. State Representative Vicky Riback Wilson, Chair of the Children's Services Commission, charged the Early Childhood Subcommittee with developing recommendations for creating a cohesive system that results in the healthy development of and high quality education for Missouri's youngest citizens. She emphasized that the proposed strategies should focus on two policy goals:

1. improving and increasing access to services
2. ensuring that existing services and programs work together more efficiently and effectively.

Based on a vision for a comprehensive early childhood system, the Subcommittee was divided into four workgroups to address the charge.

- State Infrastructure and Early Childhood Programs
- Ready Schools and Family Support
- Health, Mental Health and Nutrition
- Economic Opportunity and Safe Environments

Following much discussion, the Subcommittee reached two key conclusions. First, each state department has made great strides in enhancing services and programs for young children and their families. Second, while Missouri has made much progress, no entity has the distinct charge, authority or accountability to conduct statewide systems planning or to ensure that the state's resources to support young children are being used in the most effective and efficient ways.

Thus, a key recommendation from the Subcommittee is to establish a formal infrastructure—a Coordinating Board for Early Childhood—in state statute, linked with the Children's Services Commission, to coordinate the complex array of existing programs and services for young children. The Coordinating Board would be authorized to receive public and private funds.

The Subcommittee also identified various policy actions that can be taken both immediately and over the next several years to develop a comprehensive system of services and supports for young children and their families. These recommendations are identified as administrative or legislative. They are

prioritized as either short- or long-term. It is encouraging to note that many concrete steps can be taken without additional resources.

This report is designed to serve as the framework for development of a long-range strategic plan for ensuring that Missouri's youngest citizens have access to what they need to be healthy, happy, and ready for school. The subsequent section begins with details about a Coordinating Board for Early Childhood. It then highlights the recommendations from each workgroup with a brief rationale for why such action is needed. It concludes with a challenge to invest now in ensuring Missouri's future.

The Recommendations

The workgroups and the Early Childhood Subcommittee recommends a series of policy actions that will continue Missouri's forward movement toward an organized system of services that better support young children and their families. They have been grouped into three broad action steps to be taken over the next several months and years.

Action Step One: Establish in state statute a Coordinating Board for Early Childhood.

Rationale. Missouri lacks a formal coordinating body for systemic planning, accountability, and integration of the vast array of services and programs that support young children and their families. This results in fragmentation, overlap, and gaps in services. It also makes accountability for improved outcomes for young children difficult and presents challenges in maximizing limited resources.

A Coordinating Board for Early Childhood should be established as a separate legal entity—a Body Corporate and Politic—linked with the Children's Services Commission. The Board would be composed of fifteen to nineteen members representing a diverse mix of public and private individuals. Members would include representatives from the Governor's office, the Lieutenant Governor's office, the Children's Services Commission, the Family and Community Trust Board, state departments (minimally, DESE, DHSS, DMH and DSS), Head Start, business, philanthropy, civic groups, education—public schools and higher education, faith-based organizations, parent groups, advocacy organizations, and early childhood service providers.

Responsibilities of the Board would include the following.

- Develop and implement a comprehensive, statewide, long-range, strategic plan for a cohesive early childhood system built on existing efforts and plans

- Determine legislative strategies for fiscal support of services for young children
- Be accountable for the effective use of resources, including monitoring and responding to key school readiness indicators
- Coordinate existing services and programs across state departments and with the private sector
- Explore, and where possible, leverage funding to maximize resources
- Encourage and support the pursuit of rule waiver authority in support of the statewide plan
- Promote research-based approaches to services and assure ongoing program evaluation
- Solicit private resources—people and dollars—and receive and expend public and private funds in support of the strategic plan
- Identify and close service gaps and reduce duplication of services
- Ensure the efficient and effective delivery of services

While appropriations to state agencies would remain under the fiduciary authority and control of individual departments, based on recommendations from the Board resources should support the statewide strategic plan and be used in the most effective way to leverage private and corporate investments.

The Subcommittee also recommends that local coordinating boards be established to provide leadership and guidance within communities. The Board should develop a process for formally designating local partners. Where such entities already exist, e.g., Family and Community Trust partnerships, these bodies might assume responsibility for coordinating early childhood services at the local level. If such entities do not currently exist, the Coordinating Board would provide technical assistance to establish them.

Expected Outcomes. Establishment of a central entity charged with creating a statewide early childhood system will provide the following benefits.

- Centralized, authorized locus for systemic planning, ensuring that state agencies are working together and with the private sector to build a comprehensive system
- A formal entity distinctly focused on improving outcomes for young children
- Coordinated fiscal plans and accountability across departments
- A formalized, coordinated mechanism for engaging the private sector and promoting strategic investments
- Streamlined programs and services, including more efficient and effective use of resources.

Action Step Two: During state fiscal year 2004, implement several new policies to increase access to quality child care and improve existing services.

Rationale. Numerous studies tell us that quality interventions targeted to the most at-risk children, e.g., those in poverty and those whose mothers have minimal education, produce significant results, including reductions in special education, enhanced school performance, reductions in involvement in the juvenile justice system, and increased earnings.

The Subcommittee identified several policy strategies to increase access to services for Missouri's most disadvantaged families and to improve the quality of services for young children, including ensuring their health and safety in out-of-home care. The following specific steps are recommended for policy action during state fiscal year 2004.

Legislative Action—Early Childhood Programs

- Cap the total number of children that can be cared for without licensure at ten
- Set reimbursement rates for families receiving child care subsidies to provide access to 75 percent of the market by 2015
- Increase eligibility levels for child care subsidies from 115 percent of poverty to 150 percent of poverty by 2015

Legislative Action—Economic Opportunities and Safe Environments

- Require all registered child care providers to complete basic training in health and safety and subsequently to complete a health and safety checklist

Administrative Action—Early Childhood Programs

- Pilot a quality star rating system for child care centers and homes

Administrative Action—Ready Schools and Family Support

- Continue double count payments for Pre-Kindergarten students for summer school
- Require collaboratively developed transition plans to ease the transition for children entering Kindergarten through the Missouri School Improvement Process
- Require completion of early childhood courses for certification of elementary school principals
- Provide professional development to teachers on effective strategies for working with families via the Regional Professional Development Centers
- Increase the number of visits by Parents as Teachers for 3-5 year-olds based on need
- Increase the number of high-need families participating in Parents as Teachers
- Assure adoption of Parents as Teachers quality standards and family involvement design by all school districts and PAT programs

Administrative Action—Health, Mental Health, and Nutrition

- Increase educational outreach to child care providers on injury prevention
- Increase the percentage of young children in poverty screened for lead
- Maximize utilization of EPSDT screenings and follow-up
- Increase competencies of child care providers in promoting emotional development
- Increase access to mental health services for children on MC+
- Promote development of mental health consultation expertise for the early childhood population through the Children's Mental Health System of Care Team

Administrative Action—Economic Opportunities and Safe Environments

- Ensure all licensed child care centers and homes are smoke free
- Expand business development support to encourage entrepreneurship in rural areas by working with University Extension and utility cooperatives
- Establish Individual Development Accounts for TANF-eligible families by expanding utilization of the existing Family Development Account tax credit program and TANF resources
- Increase support to foster and adoptive parents of young children, including specialized training in child development

Action Step Three: Over the next two years, the Coordinating Board for Early Childhood in collaboration with the Children's Services Commission and other key stakeholders should prioritize and develop an implementation plan for a series of policy recommendations to continue quality improvements and increase access to services.

Rationale. The research is clear. Young children need: loving parents; nurturing relationships with caring adults; safe, stable, stimulating environments; adequate health care and food, and opportunities to explore and learn.

The Subcommittee offers the following broad policy action steps for consideration. These steps will create a framework for development of a more comprehensive, long-range strategic plan to ensure that all of Missouri's young children have the essential ingredients for their success. More specific recommendations to achieve this goal are identified in the Appendix.

Early Childhood Programs

- Expand access to quality care and education for children in poverty, e.g., increase state investments in Early Head Start
- Provide developmental screenings for all two-year-olds and appropriate follow-up services

Ready Schools and Family Support

- Develop effective networks of family support services, building on existing home visitation models

Health, Mental Health, and Nutrition

- Address the shortage of pediatric oral health professionals
- Improve access to health care and ensure establishment of medical homes, especially for children in poverty and those with special health care needs
- Improve access to services for young children with special needs, including developmental delays
- Increase access to, and when needed utilization of, mental health services for young children

Economic Opportunities and Safe Environments

- Establish a state Earned Income Tax Credit refundable at 20 percent of the federal Earned Income Tax Credit by 2010
- Establish a dependent care tax credit by 2010
- Create incentives for business investment in early care and education
- Improve the capacity of the child welfare system to ensure the healthy development of young children

Conclusion

The first years of a child's life are ones of amazing growth and development. Research confirms that what happens during these years—from birth to about age eight—creates either a fragile or solid foundation for the rest of a child's life. We know that the environments where children spend time—whether at home, at Auntie's, or in a child care center—matter, and that the relationships infants, toddlers, and preschoolers have with their caregivers matter.

We know that parents who work need to be comfortable with the care their children are receiving to be productive in the workplace. We know that children who are hungry, tired, ill, or upset, and those with behavior problems have difficulty sitting still, getting along with others, paying attention, and following directions—all necessary skills for participating in formal education. We know that children who do not experience reading, cuddling, and being held shy away from exploring their world and trying new things. Research indicates that young children who start school behind their more advantaged peers often fall further behind and the achievement gap continues to widen.

We know what works. Research tells us that carefully designed quality interventions targeted to the most disadvantaged children have significant impacts on children's school performance. We know that children raised in stimulating environments—full of play things, safe places to explore, and adults who care about them—are more confident, more independent, more creative, and more willing to take growth-producing risks. Children without these opportunities fail to build the neural connections that support these traits.

We know that investing in young children is good economics and sound social policy. Art Rolnick, Senior Vice President and Director of Research at the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis and one of Minnesota's most influential economists, submits that investments in quality early care and education can produce a conservative 12 percent rate of return, adjusted for inflation—a rate higher than for any other public investment. These returns arise from reduced costs of special education, increased rates of graduation, decreased costs of welfare and crime, and increased earnings.^{xx}

Missouri has an unprecedented opportunity to lead the nation by developing a comprehensive, coordinated system to support young children and their families. Key to achieving this goal is establishing a Coordinating Board for Early Childhood as the formalized, authorized body responsible for creating and implementing a long-range strategic plan leading to a cohesive early childhood system. The report also highlights additional steps that are necessary to ensure that every young child in Missouri will have the essential ingredients they need to succeed and subsequently build a strong economic future for generations to come.

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Appendix D: Parental Responsibilities Subcommittee Report

Report to the Children's Services Commission

November 24, 2003-revised Jan. 8, 2004

Policy, Procedure and Programming Recommendations Related

to

Parental Responsibilities

The Children's Services Commission is charged with: "making recommendations which will encourage greater interagency coordination, cooperation, more effective utilization of existing resources and less duplication of effort in activities of state agencies which affect the legal rights and well-being of children in Missouri."

Background of the Parental Responsibilities Sub-Committee

This sub-committee was formed in 2003 in response both to research findings (Dannerbeck 2003) presented to the Commission indicating that many delinquent youth had been subjected to ineffective parenting practices and in response to parenting needs Commission members found in their own communities.

Members: Charles Jackson, sub-committee chair and Director, Department of Public Safety

Anne Dannerbeck, Ph.D., University of Missouri School of Social Work

Tammy Gillespie, Director, Family and Community Resource Program, University Outreach and Extension

Bill Heberle, Director, Children's Trust Fund

Kate Wright, private citizen

Margi Bilyeu, Department of Public Safety

In addition, valuable assistance was received from:

Karen Hoelker, Parents As Teachers National Office

Carol Mertensmeyer-Ryan, Director, Parent Link

Darin Preis, Missouri Head Start State Collaboration Office

Activities: This body met three times to discuss issues, formulate a plan of action, and develop recommendations. A Parenting Responsibilities focus group was held at a juvenile treatment facility with young men, some fathers, and some intending to be fathers in the future. The purpose of the focus group was to elicit information on their attitudes and behaviors regarding parenting, accessing outside help as a parent, and regarding three specific programs widely offered in Missouri: Head Start, Parents as Teachers, and Parent Link.

Current Situation: Many parenting programs and resources exist in Missouri for all types of parents with children of various ages and needs. These programs include traditional day care centers, child care programs that include wraparound services for the family, namely Headstart and Early Headstart, in-home visitation programs like Parents As Teachers, and parenting information resources like Parent Link. Given the high incidence of ineffective parenting associated with abused and neglected children and adjudicated youth, these programs must not be reaching an important segment of their audience.

Recommendation 1

Develop a statewide distribution and access point for information on parenting.

Recommended Plan of Action

- ParentLink could be the statewide contact point. Parent Link provides easily accessible (via toll-free telephone line, internet access, and information kiosks in public places) information about parenting issues to parents, professionals, and communities. Their resources include on-line information about child development as well as community-based programs serving parents and children, expert staffed phone lines, and supports for communities looking to better meet the needs of local youth and families. Recognition from the Commission will facilitate the further dissemination of this parenting resource network and will help in identifying one contact that everyone can use.
- A link can be created from the Commission website to Parent Link.

Recommendation 2

Encourage more innovative distribution of information about parenting programs.

Recommended Plan of Action

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- Explore the use of Extension Resource Centers' video interactivity teleconferencing abilities as one approach to expanding access to parenting programs.
 - Promote awareness of parenting information to a broader distribution network including faith-based institutions, hospitals, emergency responders, schools, health departments and other public agency offices.

Recommendation 3

Better coordinate programs and activities among publicly funded parenting programs.

Recommended Plan of Action

- Encourage more inter-agency coordination among all branches of government at the state and local level and the Children's Trust Fund in disseminating information on parenting programs.
- Call for a summit of publicly funded parent programs to develop a plan of action to better coordinate their programs and publicize them.
- Work with Community Connections (web-based source of information on statewide community resources) to identify parenting programs.

Recommendation 4

Develop a way to assess and communicate the level of effectiveness of parenting education programs available in the state.

Recommended Plan of Action

- Inform judges about the existence of the assessment mechanism.
- Identify ways to disseminate the assessments to stakeholders.

Appendix C: Children of Incarcerated Parents Subcommittee Report

Report to the Children's Services Commission

Introduction

In accordance with the provisions of SB720 passed in 1998, the Children of Incarcerated Parents Task Force was established during the March 22, 1999, meeting of the Children's Services Commission. Current members of this special Task Force include:

Co-Chairs

Senator Betty Sims, District 24
Representative Vicky Riback Wilson, District 25

Members as of October 2002

Judge Susan Block, Family Court of St. Louis County
Fannie Gaw, Department of Corrections, Probation and Parole Board
Charles Jackson, Director, Department of Public Safety
Gary Kempker, Director, Department of Corrections
Kathy Martin, Director, Department of Social Services
Linda Roebuck, Deputy Director, Department of Mental Health
Julie Rollins, Women's Program Manager, Department of Corrections
Mark Steward, Director, Division of Youth Services
Betty Thompson, Representative, District 72

Other Participants

Barbara Baker, Center for Women in Transition
Sister Fran Buschell, Diocese of Jefferson City

Dr. Anne Dannerbeck, School of Social Work, University of Missouri
Marie Kenyon, School of Law, St. Louis University
Pam Palacios, Mothers and Children Together
Sandy Rempe, Department of Public Safety

Purpose

In accordance with SB720 passed by the General Assembly of the State of Missouri, and RSMo 210.875, 210.877, and 210.879 (*Appendix A*), the Children of Incarcerated Parents Task Force was established to improve the lives of children affected by the incarceration of a custodial parent.

Goal

The goal of this Task Force is to review and study the effects of incarceration on the children of individuals in the custody of the Missouri Department of Corrections or the Division of Youth Services and recommend to the legislature and executive branch, appropriate changes in laws and policies that are in the best interest* of the children of Missouri. This report is intended to serve as a guide for continuing attention, action, and policy change on behalf of the children of incarcerated parents.

Values and Objectives

The Task Force recommends that the following values guide future statutory and policy change.

1. Incarceration should be used only to the extent that it is effective, as evidenced by sound research.
2. Alternatives to incarceration should be preferred public policy for nonviolent offenders.
3. Offenders should be able to spend time with their children, when contact is in the best interest of the child.
4. Intensive wrap-around and community-based services are essential to assist the children of incarcerated parents and their caregivers during the time of parental incarceration. These services are also needed to assist offenders make a successful transition back into their community and family upon release from detention.

History

The Task Force has met regularly for the past four years (*Appendix B—minutes*). On December 1, 1999, the Children’s Services Commission submitted an initial report on the Task Force’s findings relative to custody and visitation patterns to the General Assembly of the State of Missouri (*Appendix C*).

Since the initial report, areas of study, in addition to the focus required in the legislation, have been identified. These include the (1) analysis of the current population of incarcerated parents, (2) the pre-incarceration process for offenders with children, (3) sentencing practices of the state of Missouri, (4) the support systems that are in place for incarcerated parents and their children, (5) the impacts on children of having an incarcerated custodial parent, and (6) recommendations for statutory and policy changes that emphasize the best interests of the children of Missouri.

The Task Force recognizes the importance of both incarcerated mothers and fathers. Due to budget and time constraints, however the Task Force’s initial focus has been with female offenders. This population was identified for the following reasons:

1. Fewer women than men are incarcerated, and they are consolidated into fewer facilities.
2. Mother’s are more likely than fathers to be the primary caregiver of children at the time of arrest.
3. Issues surrounding paternity make identifying incarcerated fathers problematic.

Nevertheless, the Task Force continues to look at programs and policies that affect fathers. It is the intention of the Task Force to continue to explore recommendations regarding fathers and mothers.

In 1998, Missouri’s Children’s Services Commission was one of the first states to initiate study and action regarding children of incarcerated parents. Since that time, several other states and interest groups have begun to investigate this topic. The state of California is home to the Center for Children of Incarcerated Parents (CCIP). The CCIP established the Prison Parents Education Project in 1990. Child developmental specialists and formerly incarcerated parents developed PPEP to educate incarcerated parents on the many issues their children face, and how the parents can best facilitate successful development in their children.

Accomplishments

The initial efforts of the Task Force resulted in the revision of the Missouri Department of Corrections’ policies and practices regarding family-friendly visiting environments. The changes were prompted, in part, by a comprehensive, face-to-face survey of female offenders with children. The survey, conducted in the summer of 1999, asked each

offender for suggestions on how to improve their relationship with their children, among other questions.

The Department of Corrections is presently involved in developing three re-entry initiatives that ensure a seamless transition into society after incarceration. The first of these initiatives, the Female Re-entry Program, allows for employment and wrap-around services to be established for women returning to St. Louis from Women's Eastern Diagnostic and Correctional Center prior to their release. Wrap-around services include childcare, transportation, mental health, substance abuse, medical, and housing. The second program is the Serious and Violent Re-entry Grant. This program targets women who have been convicted of serious and violent crimes. The services offered to this population are the same as the Female Re-entry Program. Finally, the Department of Corrections is receiving technical assistance from the National Institute of Corrections regarding Transition from prison to community. This initiative encourages re-entry planning to begin the day prisoners come into the correctional facility and to continue until the day of release.

A Women's Program Manager was hired by the Missouri Department of Corrections to coordinate efforts to provide services for incarcerated women and evaluate their success in transitioning back into their communities following release. A Women's Advisory Committee has been formed with representation from Mental Health, Health and Senior Services, Prosecutor Services, Office of the Court Administrator, and other community organizations to assist the Department of Corrections on issues relative to incarcerated women. A Women's Issues Committee has also been formed with Department of Corrections staff to address the needs of women offenders in the criminal justice system. These committees work to address issues regarding incarcerated women, women under supervision, training needs for those staff working with women and gender specific policy and procedures that recognize the differing needs of men and women prisoners.

The Department of Youth Services identified those youth in their custody who had incarcerated parents or those who have children of their own. (*Appendix D*)

In September of 2001, Mothers and Children Together of St. Louis received an 18-month planning grant from the National Institute of Corrections to develop a comprehensive plan for providing services to the children of prisoners. The team is currently identifying gaps in services that children of prisoners and their caregivers face, and developing comprehensive community strategies to address these issues.

<h2>Task Force Progress</h2>

❖ Current Population of Incarcerated Parents

While Missouri is the seventeenth most populous state in the union, it is among the top ten for number of persons behind bars (U.S. Census, 2000). As of 2001, there were

2,077 female inmates in the state of Missouri, which leads the Midwest in women behind bars. Non-violent convictions account for 60.77% of the female incarcerated population. Nearly fifty percent of the women presently incarcerated have no history of criminal activity. In a recent survey conducted by the Missouri Department of Corrections, over seventy-eight percent of incarcerated women reported having at least one dependent—leaving over 4,000 Missouri children without mothers. (*Appendix E—Status Report on Women Offenders*).

It is not cost-effective to incarcerate nonviolent offenders. The average cost for a woman to be incarcerated is slightly over \$36 per day. The cost to the Department of Family Services for her children to be in foster care for fiscal year 2002 was between \$ 227.00 and \$307.00 per month, per child (depending on the age of the child). The cost for a person on probation or parole supervision is only \$3.34 per day. Even when considering the cost of intensive services, alternative sentencing costs the state significantly less than the cost of incarceration.

❖ **Current Approaches for Sentencing of Custodial Parents**

- *Traditional Sentencing*— Although Missouri has enacted legislation supporting the practice of restorative justice; most women continue to serve punitive sentences for non-violent criminal activity.
 - ✓ According to the Department of Corrections' 30-year overview of the women offender population, there was a 311% increase in the number of incarcerated females from 1978-1988. From 1988 to 2001, there was an additional 234% increase. (*Appendix E*)
 - ✓ As of October 2002, the state of Missouri has 1,521 female parolees and 10,182 male parolees; 11,866 female probationers, and 37,487 male probationers.
- *Alternatives to Incarceration*— Because the majority of incarcerated women are the primary custodian of at least one child under the age of 18, it is important to investigate alternatives to traditional sentencing in an effort to maintain families, when doing so is in the best interest of the child. Alternative sentencing and intensive wrap-around services also assist in breaking the generational cycle of incarceration. Alternative sentencing is presently used on a very limited basis.
 - ✓ *Drug Courts* are an effective alternative to incarceration. Offenders are typically offered a stay of prosecution if they agree to participate in a court-supervised treatment program. Upon successful completion of the program, the participant may be discharged without a criminal record; however, failure to complete the program results in the filing of criminal charges. This program allows mothers who are charged with drug offenses to maintain the caregiver role while receiving treatment for their addictions. There are presently 58 drug

courts in operation in the state of Missouri. Unfortunately drug courts are often underutilized because judges and prosecutors may only refer an offender to the program after the offender has pleaded guilty. Missouri drug courts have been remarkably effective, yet their successfulness continues to go unrecognized. (*Appendix F*)

- ✓ *Mental Health Courts* serve offenders with co-occurring disorders (mental disorder and substance abuse disorder), developmental disabilities, or head injury in the criminal justice system. The pilot program, in Springfield, Missouri, offers many of the same benefits that the Drug Court program offers, in addition to providing care for offenders with mental disorders. The goal of the MHC program is to reduce the number of offenders with co-occurring disorders committed to the Department of Corrections while still providing for public safety. Successful completion of the program may result in deferred prosecution for the offender. (*Appendix G—Mental Health Court*)
- ✓ *Restorative Justice* (commonly referred to as RJ) is another common form of alternative sentencing. RJ seeks to address a specific offense through direct restitution to the victim (financially or through services provided by the offender) or indirect restitution via community service. Although RJ includes a broad range of practices, the most common is victim-offender mediation. This practice has been shown to be an effective approach for dealing with crime, as well as reviving the community. This comprehensive approach seeks not only to repair the physical damage but also the personal and emotional damage through face-to-face communication. While RJ has become increasingly popular for juvenile offenders, it has not been largely employed for adult offenders.
- ✓ Various other states use innovative alternative sentencing programming. These programs merit further research to determine what the best practices are in regards to alternative sentencing that could be utilized in the state of Missouri.

While alternative sentencing has been legislatively endorsed, and in spite of the fact that evidence exists that alternatives can be both cost-effective and reduce recidivism rates, such programs are still under-funded and under-utilized by prosecuting attorneys and judges.

❖ Pre-incarceration Process for Custodial Parents

When a custodial parent is arrested, the State of Missouri has no specific policy or routine process to identify and coordinate what happens to the dependent children. Although the

Department of Family Services uses Notice of Incarceration forms (*CS-2, CS-2-ATT—Appendix H*), these forms do not provide information about what will happen to the children of the arrested parents, nor do they provide information about what will happen to that parent's custodial rights upon incarceration. Presiding judges may be unaware of the issues surrounding the Termination of Parental Rights (TPR). Incarcerated parents may also be unclear about TPR. This lack of information, and general distrust of government, often encourages parents to withhold information at the time of their arrest. They may be reluctant to provide information regarding the number of children they provide care for, the paternity of those children, and the present location of their children, because they fear what might happen to those children. This insufficient information leads to children receiving less than appropriate care while their custodial parent is incarcerated.

❖ Existing Support Systems for Children of Incarcerated Parents

There are a variety of existing private organizations that have developed support programs and services for incarcerated parents and their children. An inmate's participation in these programs is usually dependent upon his/her behavior (an inmate must be violation free for 90 days in order to participate in most programs). Therefore, the parent's poor behavior adversely affects their children. Participation in these programs is intended to strengthen parent-child bonds, not be used as means of punishment for inmates' poor behavior. In addition, children of incarcerated parents end up being harmed by not being allowed to visit with their parent.

- *Girl Scouts Behind Bars*
 - The Girl Scout Council of Greater St. Louis has formed troops for girls whose mothers are in prison. This special troop arranges transportation for girls to see their mothers in prison. Mothers are allowed to help their daughters with girl scouting projects thus enhancing the bond between mother and daughter while the mother serves her sentence. Although a national project, in Missouri this program is presently only available in the Greater St. Louis area. GS behind bars is funded through grants and donations from private industry.
- *Living Interactive Family Education Program*
 - The L.I.F.E. program was developed jointly between 4-H, University of Missouri-Columbia Outreach Center and incarcerated fathers to address the needs of children of incarcerated parents. Fathers participate in parenting classes as well as structured activities with their sons. The L.I.F.E. program seeks to enhance visitation programming at a maximum-security prison in Missouri.
- *Mothers and Children Together*
 - M&CT is a collaborative program committed to promoting family unity, when the primary caregiver is incarcerated. This program

arranges transpiration for children to visit their mothers at the Women's Eastern Reception and Diagnostic Correctional Center four times a year. The program also provides group processes in the schools for children with family members in prison, and acts as an advocate for children in the criminal justice and social services systems.

In addition to privately funded programs, the Missouri Department of Corrections, in cooperation with other groups, also offers programs and services within the prisons to facilitate the bond between incarcerated parents and their children.

- *StoryLink*
 - Offers offenders the opportunity to read to their children via audiocassette.
- *Parents as Teachers*
 - In partnership with local school districts, PAT is a project that provides incarcerated parents with parenting classes.
- *Parents and Their Children*
 - PATCH is an organization that strives to maintain and strengthen the bonds between children and their incarcerated parents. The program arranges transportation for children to see their incarcerated parents, assisting in the maintenance of the parent/child bond while the offender is away.
- *Parenting Classes*
 - A series of videos, workshops, and discussions are offered at detention facilities to enhance the parenting skills of incarcerated mothers and fathers. Unfortunately these classes are not geared towards the developmental stages of the inmates' children and are therefore not necessarily beneficial for all inmates with children.

The Department of Corrections also offers programs that are available for all inmates to participate in, but may be particularly beneficial for parents. These programs can be particularly beneficial for parents in increasing their chances for success in their community and family after release.

- *Substance Abuse Programs*
 - Several drug rehabilitation programs currently exist for women in detention facilities. These programs are run by staff, who are trained for gender specific rehabilitation. Drug treatment programs offered through the MO DOC include:
 - 120-day Program
 - 84-day Program—for returning women as a result of parole violations.
 - Long Term Drug Program—one to two year program
 - 180-day Offenders Under Treatment Program (OUT)

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- Also Available are AA, NA, and the 12-step program that meet weekly under the guidance of staff or volunteers.
 - *Vocational and Educational Training Programs*
 - Vocational Education is critical to reducing recidivism rates. There are a variety of trade programs offered by the MO DOC available for women who choose to participate.
 - Additional Services are available through the Department of Justice (*See Appendix E*)

There are also post-release programs within communities to assist parents with the transition from incarceration back into their communities and families.

- Center for Women in Transition—CWIT began in 1993 in an effort to connect women with necessary resources to make their transition back into mainstream society easier. They provide one-on-one mentoring and a variety of other programs to help women restore faith in themselves and the hope that they can have a life beyond prison.
- C-STAR—The C-STAR Alternative Care Program was developed in accordance with the Missouri Revised Statutes, Chapter 191, as a pilot program to be one alternative to incarceration. It is designed for female offenders being released from correctional institutions, as well as those under probationary supervision. As a joint effort by the Missouri Department of Corrections and the Missouri Department of Mental Health, Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse, this program offers outpatient substance abuse counseling, family therapy, and other support services to women and their children while facilitating reintegration with the family and community. Alt-Care Programs are located in Kansas City and St. Louis.

A variety of other community and religious organizations provide services to incarcerated parents and their children. However, without adequate coordination, it is impossible to list all such services. Although a variety of support systems are available, there are still many needs that are continually overlooked. This Task Force would like to see other ideas implemented to assist children of incarcerated parents, particularly those living in rural areas of Missouri, where resources are not readily available.

❖ **Impacts of Incarceration on the Children**

The incarceration of a custodial parent is extremely traumatic for a child. One in five children affected by the incarceration of a parent will witness that parent's arrest, and those who do not will reconstruct it with their vivid imaginations. After the arrest of a parent, a child's living arrangements are disrupted and often uncertain. A child of an

incarcerated parent generally lives with another relative or in a state-funded placement, such as foster homes or residential care facilities, while that parent is serving time in prison. Often these conditions result in the child living in poverty. Contact with an incarcerated parent is limited at best. Most facilities do not have child-friendly environments for visits. Prison visits are costly and time consuming and are often not feasible, especially for families with limited resources, who are most affected by the arrest of a single custodial parent. Children often experience sadness, guilt and the feeling of aloneness while separated from their parent.

The stigma of incarceration has a significant impact on a child's life. Teasing and taunting by peers is embarrassing and exacerbates problems at school. At risk behavior increases with the incarceration of a parent, including, but not limited to, poor academic performance, truancy, dropping out of school, gang involvement, early pregnancy, drug abuse, and delinquency. Over 13 percent of children of incarcerated parents are themselves involved with the criminal justice system in the state of Missouri before the age of 18. The incarceration of a custodial parent is exceptionally costly, not only for our children, but also for our state.

❖ Continued Research

Research efforts by various groups continue to look at the impacts that the incarceration of a parent has on a child, and what the best practices are in regards to maintaining the best interest of the child.

- ✓ Examining the Relationship between Parental Incarceration and Juvenile Delinquency. *Grant Proposal for Dr. Anne Dannerbeck, University of Missouri-Columbia, School of Social Work (Appendix—I)*
- ✓ Project L.I.F.E. continues to research the impact of enhanced visitation programs on the children of incarcerated parents. (*Appendix—J*)
- ✓ Mothers and Children Together is presently working to develop a comprehensive plan for services to children of prisoners via their planning grant from the National Institute of Corrections. M&CT has also provided the Task Force a list of additional recommendations regarding children of incarcerated parents (*Appendix K—Collaborative Planning Process for Children of Incarcerated Parents*)
- ✓ The California State Library Research Bureau is currently conducting a Task Force on Children of Incarcerated Parents. Their final report will be available in April of 2003.
- ✓ The state of Indiana has instituted progressive visitation and alternative sentencing policies that enhance the bond between incarcerated parents and their children. Indiana's programs, such as Residential Community Corrections, Day Reporting, and the Families in Transition Program, could be used as models in Missouri.

Conclusions and Task Force Recommendations for Statutory, Rule and Policy Change

Missouri is fortunate to have many programs that strive to build or maintain parent-child relationships, yet there is little coordination of these resources and much remains to be done. Too often, the children's needs are ignored when sentencing non-violent offenders. The Task Forces encourages that a holistic approach be used in providing for the needs of the children of incarcerated parents. The Children of Incarcerated Parents Task Force believes that education and training on what constitutes the best interest of the child is one key factor for improving the lives of children affected by the incarceration of a custodial parent. Also important in improving the lives of these children is the consistent use of alternative sentencing for custodial parents; the promotion of family bonding while a parent is incarcerated, when the child's best interests are served by family preservation; and intensive wrap-around and community services are made available and accessible after the parents release.

Many groups are working on issues that impact the recommendations of this Task Force. It is the intention of the Children's Services Commission to work with the Families and Communities Trust, the Child Abuse, Custody and Neglect Commission, State Departments and other private and public entities to encourage and facilitate the implementation of these recommendations. While some of these recommendations may be beyond the scope of the original charge of the Task Force, they have all been found to have an impact on incarcerated parents' success in building and maintaining a strong family unit.

The following recommendations have been developed to insure that the best interest of the children of Missouri will become a factor in determining appropriate placement for nonviolent offenders with children.

The Children's Services Commission respectfully submits the following recommendations for future policy and practice initiatives and changes. Because the Children's Services Commission's primary interest is the welfare of Missouri's children, all recommendations are intended to be used only when they serve in the best interest of the child of an incarcerated parent.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Custody and Visitation During Parental Incarceration:

- 1. Facilitate visitation between children and parents, when contact is in the best interest of the child, by reviewing, revising and coordinating the policies of the Department of Corrections and the Division of Family Services in cooperation with those affected by the parental incarceration including, but not limited to, formerly incarcerated parents, family members, counselors, therapists and social workers.**
 - a) Examine guidelines for offenders' participation in parenting and visitation programs to ensure that the parents' denial of participation due**

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- to behavior violations does not hinder the programs' benefits for the children. Programs should be specific to each parents need.
- b) Visitation areas should be expanded, and existing outdoor facilities should be used to their fullest potential.
2. Provide transportation for children of incarcerated parents in an effort to maintain the parental bond, when contact is in the best interest of the child.
 3. Use teleconferencing for custodial placement meetings so that incarcerated parents can participate in this decision making-process about the future of their children.

Sentencing Alternatives:

1. Develop guidelines and additional alternative sentencing options for nonviolent offenders that can be applied consistently and frequently, in an effort to allow parents to remain with their children, when doing so is in the best interest of the child.
 - a) This process should include the Children's Services Commission; the Child Abuse, Custody and Neglect Commission pursuant to RSMo 26.740; the Sentencing Advisory Commission pursuant to RSMo 558.019; the judicial branch; and the Department of Corrections; and other involved stakeholders.
 - b) Alternatives include, but are not limited to, house arrest, community service, restorative justice, treatment centers, drug courts and mental health courts.
 - c) Presiding judges should investigate alternative sentencing options, and report their findings that less restrictive options were not suitable, before issuing a sentence of incarceration.
 - d) Initial efforts should focus on nonviolent offenders who are custodial parents.
2. Review the funding options available from the Department of Public Safety, and the Office of the State Court Administrator for alternative sentencing, and other family focused approaches that concentrate on the children of incarcerated parents, in an attempt to break the familial cycle of incarceration.
3. Evaluate diversionary programs with financial incentives, for the use of alternative sentencing, for possible savings to the state through decreased cost of incarceration.
4. Assure that alternative sentencing programs and pilot projects are family friendly. Such programs should support parental contact with children, when

contact is in the best interest of the child, and provide for parental development in an effort to strengthen the family unit.

Procedures, Policies, and Programs:

4. **Develop a standardized, easy to understand guide to inform involved parties about custody and guardianship issues of children of incarcerated parents. This guide should include a glossary of relevant terms and an explanation of the options for child custody during parental incarceration. The guide should be appropriate for use by incarcerated parents and family members, law enforcement officers, judges, social service agency personnel, public defenders, and other involved parties.**
5. **Review, revise, develop, and implement guidelines for parole and probation revocation. The Department of Corrections and the Probation and Parole Board should include all stakeholders in this process, including formerly incarcerated parents.**
6. **The Department of Public Safety, and the Division of Family Services should develop a standardized process to identify the children of arrested individuals, and make appropriate arrangements for the care of those children, prior to the time of parental sentencing.**
7. **Cross departmental training on what constitutes the best interest of the child should be provided for law enforcement officers, judges, Division of Family Services personnel, Department of Corrections personnel, Juvenile Officers, Department of Education, public defenders, Guardians ad litem, and all other involved parties, to ensure that children receive appropriate services.**
8. **Assure that all education and treatment programs are available, accessible, appropriate and effective for those who need them.**
9. **Explore models in other states pertaining to alternative sentencing and funding initiatives, such as designating a portion of each dollar spent by the Department of Corrections for programming that supports the children of incarcerated parents.**

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